

# KEY TEXTS FROM PENTAGON'S VIETNAM

Following are texts of key documents from the Pentagon's history of the Vietnam war, covering events of August, 1964, to February, 1965, the period in which the bombing of North Vietnam was planned. Except where excerpting is specified, the documents are printed verbatim, with only unmistakable typographical errors corrected.

## Rusk Cable to Embassy in Laos On Search and Rescue Flights

Cablegram from Secretary of State Dean Rusk to the United States Embassy in Vientiane, Laos, Aug. 26, 1964. A copy of this message was sent to the Commander in Chief, Pacific.

We agree with your assessment of importance SAR operations that Air America pilots can play critically important role, and SAR efforts should not discriminate between rescuing Americans, Thais and Lao. You are also hereby granted as requested discretionary authority to use AA pilots in T-28's for SAR operations when you consider this indispensable rpt indispensable to success of operation and with understanding that you will seek advance Washington authorization wherever situation permits.

At same time, we believe time has come to review scope and control arrangements for T-28 operations extending into future. Such a review is especially indicated view fact that these operations more or less automatically impose demands for use of US personnel in SAR operations. Moreover, increased AA capability clearly means possibilities of loss somewhat increased, and each loss with accompanying SAR operations involves chance of escalation from one action to another in ways that may not

be desirable in wider picture. On other side, we naturally recognize T-28 operations are vital both for their military and psychological effects in Laos and as negotiating card in support of Souvanna's position. Request your view whether balance of above factors would call for some reduction in scale of operations and/or dropping of some of better-defended targets. (Possible extension T-28 operations to Panhandle would be separate issue and will be covered by septel.)

On central problem our understanding is that Thai pilots fly missions strictly controlled by your Air Command Center with [word illegible] in effective control, but that this not true of Lao pilots. We have impression latter not really under any kind of firm control.

Request your evaluation and recommendations as to future scope T-28 operations and your comments as to whether our impressions present control structure correct and whether steps could be taken to tighten this.

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it might be used by Souvanna as bargaining counter in obtaining satisfaction on his other condition that he attend conference as head of Laotian Government. Remaining condition would be cease-fire. While under present conditions cease-fire might not be of net advantage

to Souvanna—we are thinking primarily of T-28 operations—Pathet Lao would no doubt insist on it. If so, Souvanna could press for effective ICC policing of cease-fire. Latter could be of importance in upcoming period.

3. Above is written with thought in mind that Polish proposals [one word illegible] effectively collapsed and that pressures continue for Geneva [word illegible] conference and will no doubt be intensified by current crisis brought on by DRV naval attacks. Conference on Laos might be useful safety valve for these generalized pressures while at same time providing some deterrent to escalation of hostilities on that part of the "front." We would insist that conference be limited to Laos and believe that it could in fact be so limited, if necessary by our withdrawing from the conference room if any other subject brought up, as we did in 1961-62. Side discussions on other topics could not be avoided but we see no great difficulty with this; venue for informal corridor discussion with PL, DRV, and Chicom could be valuable at this juncture.

4. In considering this course of action, key initial question is of course whether Souvanna himself is prepared to drop his withdrawal precondition and whether, if he did, he could maintain himself in power in Vientiane. We gather that answer to first question is probably yes but we are much more dubious about

## Rusk Query to Vientiane Embassy On Desirability of Laos Cease-Fire

Cablegram from Secretary of State Rusk to the United States Embassy in Laos, Aug. 7, 1964. Copies were also sent, with a request for comment, to the American missions in London, Paris, Saigon, Bangkok, Ottawa, New Delhi, Moscow, Phnompenh and Hong Kong, and to the Pacific command and the mission at the United Nations.

1. As pointed out in your 219, our objective in Laos is to stabilize the situation again, if possible within framework of the 1962 Geneva settlement. Essential to stabilization would be establishment of military equilibrium in the country. Moreover, we have some concern

that recent RLG successes and reported low PL morale may lead to some escalation from Communist side, which we do not now wish to have to deal with.

2. Until now, Souvanna's and our position has been that military equilibrium would require further Lao withdrawal from areas seized in PDJ since May 15

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### Editorials

## The arrogance of power

In a column published in these pages a few days ago, R. W. Apple Jr. of the *New York Times* quoted a Washington lawyer and political strategist as saying, "How can you run against Nixon on Vietnam when he has pulled 400,000 troops out of an unpopular war and you (the Democrats) put them there in the first place?"

It's a sharp question, and it looks all the sharper in the light of the remarkable collection of official Pentagon documents on the war which the *Times* started reprinting yesterday. Because one thing these documents make painfully clear is that whatever credibility gap President Nixon's war policies have created is scarcely a millimeter wide when compared to the Grand Canyon of deceit that prevailed throughout much of the Lyndon Johnson era.

This is, to be sure, an issue in which neither party can throw stones with impunity. The Democrats can always claim that the tragedy might never have unfolded if the Eisenhower administration hadn't set the stage by pulling the rug out from under the Geneva Accords of 1954. But the fact remains that it was President Kennedy who transformed a reversible stupidity into an almost irreversible commitment. And it was President Johnson who thereupon escalated the commitment through a series of public and private deceptions into a major war.

Perhaps the most devastating revelation of the Pentagon documents is the extent to which the escalation was planned and secretly implemented long before the Tonkin Gulf incident which, in the summer of 1964, supposedly provided the justification for the air war against North Vietnam and the massive involvement of U.S. ground forces in the South. The documents confirm what the war critics had previously only suspected: that the Tonkin Gulf affair was deliberately provoked by the Johnson adminis-

tration in order to sell the American public on an escalation policy that had already been secretly mapped out in Washington.

Almost equally shocking is the evidence that the escalation was undertaken notwithstanding the opinion of the CIA and military intelligence people that it wouldn't achieve what it was designed to achieve: namely, undermine the morale of North Vietnam and cut off the flow of Communist supplies and troops to the South. Contrary to what has generally been supposed, the Johnson strategists weren't operating on the basis of faulty intelligence. They were ignoring sound intelligence.

But most disturbing of all is the evidence of the extent to which Congress, not to mention the general public, was deliberately kept in the dark about the most devious and fateful of the crucial decisions. In retrospect it is astonishing that this could be done in the atmosphere of Washington, where everybody supposedly knows everybody else's business. But done it was—so thoroughly that Senator Fulbright himself was gulled into playing the patsy by championing the Tonkin Gulf resolution on Capitol Hill.

How could so many otherwise honorable men, many of them academicians of the highest standing, have engaged in such labyrinthian policy of public deception and self-deception? Perhaps we need psychiatrists rather than social scientists to explain it. But plainly a root cause was what Senator Fulbright, when he finally saw what was happening, came to call "the arrogance of power"—the overwhelming conceit of political and military technicians who had an excess of force at their disposal and felt that the public was too damn dumb to share the decision on how to use it. Rarely has there been a more compelling vindication of Lord Acton's dictum on the corrupting effects of power.